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Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the UNDP contribution to mine action

Context and background

1. Landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) are a threat to the livelihoods, safety and security of communities recovering from conflict. They impede development and often hinder access to and/or use of natural resources. UNDP has supported mine action initiatives since 1993, when it launched a mine action programme in Cambodia. Since then, it has supported national mine action programmes in over 40 countries and provided limited assistance to another 12 countries.

2. Over the past decade, and in the years prior to 2004, UNDP mine action has focused on developing the capacities of national institutions and linking this goal to the pursuit of broader development objectives in affected countries. Activities have included:

(a) supporting the formulation and implementation of national policy and institutional frameworks, including national strategies for mine action, based on international legal obligations;

(b) providing technical advice, institutional support, capacity assessments and capacity development to national authorities for mine action activities upon request, ensuring the transition to national ownership;

(c) strengthening national information management and data collection systems, with data disaggregated by age and gender;

(d) supporting the inclusion of mine action initiatives in national budgets and facilitating the mobilization and coordination of resources.

3. As a result, with assistance from UNDP, many countries have successfully addressed their landmine and ERW contamination, enhanced their capacities to address residual risks in existing institutions (including the police or armed forces), and ensured that the needs of landmines survivors are incorporated into disability policies and programmes.

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4. The mandates of each United Nations agency on mine action are specified in the United Nations policy on mine action and effective coordination (2005). The current Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018 was developed jointly through the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA), with UNDP taking the lead on linking mine action and development. UNDP programming efforts consistently have linked mine action directly to livelihoods, governance, disaster risk reduction, peace building and reconciliation. In addition to being one of the main contributors to the IACG-MA, UNDP has contributed to policy work on international treaties and legal instruments related to ERW.

5. Mine action contributes towards meeting the goals of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 in such areas as poverty eradication, the reduction of inequalities and exclusion, peacebuilding and conflict prevention and rapid and effective recovery from conflict-induced crises where prevention has fallen short. UNDP focuses primarily on field-based initiatives and promoting their evolution from 'traditional' mine action programmes to initiatives that contribute to multiple development benefits.

6. As the evaluation points out, the UNDP 2014-2017 Strategic Plan did not specifically mention Mine Action as an area of support. Consequently, UNDP laid out plans to progressively phase out its mine action work after fulfilling current obligations. However, early in 2015, and following numerous requests and pressing demands from national counterparts, the emergence of new complex issues and the need for more coherent programmatic and inter-agency cooperation on mine action, UNDP re-engaged in mine action with a renewed and strengthened focus on its development dimensions and a demand-driven approach. The UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action was then drafted, shared with main counterparts and announced to all country offices and key partners, such as the Mine Action Support Group, in February 2015.

7. Currently, mine action policy and programme support to UNDP country offices is provided through one designated post in UNDP/New York headquarters, with two additional posts for regional hubs. These posts will backstop a network of country-based, project-funded Mine Action Advisers helping Governments and Country Offices implement Mine Action programmes, on a demand basis. The positions are part of the Livelihoods and Economic Recovery Team in the Sustainable Development Cluster of the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, working across units to incorporate governance, human rights and peacebuilding dimensions.

8. Future UNDP development and mine action programmes will be articulated in line with the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action, and will focus on three areas:

(a) translating mine action into sustainable development dividends such as, safe surroundings and freedom of movement, food security, jobs and livelihoods;

(b) strengthening national institutions that accelerate such development benefits as food security, jobs and livelihoods in mine-affected countries;

(c) supporting international normative frameworks on mine action (e.g., Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (APMBC); the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM); the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (and Protocols) (CCW); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Methodology of the evaluation

9. UNDP management welcomes the recent evaluation of the UNDP contribution to mine action. The evaluation examines in detail the important role of UNDP in supporting mine action over the period 2004-2014 and provides important lessons and recommendations for future interventions and programmes.

10. The evaluation has gathered vital data and experiences from a range of countries using mixed methods and a variety of sources. It is important to note, however, that this first evaluation of UNDP mine action work could have included an analysis of work undertaken prior to 2004 to provide a more complete set of findings and conclusions. UNDP management recognizes that the evaluation has been carried out at an opportune moment when UNDP is re-engaging in development and mine action where appropriate, i.e., based on demand from programme countries, and ensuring linkage to the outcomes of the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017.

Findings and conclusions

11. UNDP management welcomes the acknowledgement of UNDP as a significant contributor within the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018, especially for capacity development and support to national mine action programmes. There is clear recognition that UNDP has been a valuable participant in the global mine action effort, helping national Governments to establish and manage mine action programmes, and that UNDP has contributed to an increased sense of safety in affected areas, which is reported by community members as the major impact of mine action at the community level. UNDP is viewed as an impartial and reliable partner with considerable country-level knowledge, proven experience and comparative advantages in providing institutional support. UNDP management also appreciates the recognition that UNDP support has generally been successful in stimulating Governments to institutionalize mine action, including through the formal establishment of national mine action institutions, and that UNDP has promoted gender equality in its mine action work and stressed the need for gender-disaggregated data.

12. Management welcomes the incorporation of the theory of change in the evaluation, which focuses on the causal links between projects and progress in terms of outcomes and impacts. Importantly, this theory of change recognizes that UNDP mine action work should be undertaken within a broader socioeconomic development context. While UNDP's mine action work has not been carried out based on an explicit and mine action-related theory of change the mine action service line has always been part of the UNDP theory of change for crisis prevention and recovery policy and programme work. In the future, this theory of change will be adapted accordingly in the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action.

13. UNDP management takes note of the finding that while national mine action programmes have engaged with other sectors and economic actors regarding potential landmine threats to their activities, this has generally taken place through intragovernmental channels with little or no involvement of UNDP. The evaluation finds little evidence that UNDP has made linking mine action support to other development support a high priority, and has not refocused governance and poverty alleviation programming to better address the needs of mine-affected communities and individuals. Where such linkages occurred, the evaluation finds that achievements reflect the initiative of particular mine action technical advisers and country office management, and are not a result of headquarters and regional bureau initiatives.

14. In response, UNDP notes that its mine action work prior to 2004, and during the decade covered by the evaluation, has emphasized development and livelihoods recovery

in mine action support, with linkages to other programmes. Moreover, in the early 2000s, UNDP made efforts to strengthen the capacities of staff members and relevant experts to link mine action to broader development outcomes. The evaluation makes an observation that UNDP has sought to frame its support to mine action in terms of the contribution to poverty reduction, finding that in most villages visited, there was some evidence of improvements in standard of living over the course of the mine action programme, although the extent to which this was a direct result of the demining effort is difficult to quantify. The evaluation also found that the UNDP pro-poor orientation was not evident in day-to-day support to mine action, although UNDP had documented numerous examples of positive changes in the livelihoods of people and communities that became mine-free. For instance, clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) had brought significant improvements in the livelihoods of people and communities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. This additional information was offered to the evaluation team.

15. UNDP notes the finding that the most active period for UNDP headquarters in the promotion of South-South cooperation was between 2000 and 2002, when the centrally managed Mine Action Exchange provided support for travel and exchange between mine action programmes, and that UNDP utilized its own budget to continue this exchange through 2008. More recent examples of South-South cooperation include the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA), which consistently emphasized the socioeconomic impacts of demining. Currently ANAMA is exchanging knowledge and best practices with other national mine action programmes, e.g., in Afghanistan and Turkey.

16. UNDP agrees with the evaluation observation that it has had limited engagement in support to mine victims and survivors, and that in the instances where it has provided support in this area, it has focused mostly on institutional aspects and its work has been well received by national partners.

17. UNDP further notes that the reason for this limited engagement was a strategic choice rather than a programmatic shortcoming. Indeed, while victim assistance is one of the five pillars of mine action under the Mine Ban Convention, it has long been UNDP'S view, acknowledged by the 2011 Joint Inspection Unit evaluation of scope, organization, effectiveness and approach of the work of the United Nations in mine action, that victim assistance would be best addressed outside of mine action institutions and support because: i) national mine action institutions which UNDP supports have neither the mandate nor the required critical expertise in such areas as psychological and physical rehabilitation to take this on; and ii) focusing exclusively on mine victims generates perceptions of discrimination where mine victims are seen to have priority over the much larger category of people living with non-mine related disabilities.

18. While UNDP would be willing to contribute towards enabling more dedicated support to victim assistance, UNDP has always considered that such assistance would be much better provided through broader national health and other social programmes dealing not only with landmine and UXO victims, but also with all forms of disability without discrimination, specialized support from entities like the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund. Mine action institutions would then limit their role to advocacy, surveillance and risk reduction. Moving forward, UNDP would be ready to respond to targeted national demands for support to victims of landmines and other forms of violence in its areas of expertise, but would do so under broader and non-discriminatory victim assistance frameworks that are not associated with mine action, and are consequently not within the scope of the present evaluation.

There is indeed an upcoming evaluation of UNDP support to disability-inclusive development scheduled to be presented to the Board in September 2016.

19. UNDP management notes the observation of the evaluation team, attributed to "some global partners", that "UNDP has heightened problems regarding outcome achievement because of the lack of a global strategy and programmatic guidance to orient its mine action advisors." UNDP further notes that the evaluation team qualifies this perception by acknowledging that UNDP global network of mine action experts is often cited as one of the organization's competitive advantage in the mine action field.

20. This perception is, however, not accurate. UNDP's global strategy is an integral part of the United Nations mine action policy and related strategies, in which UNDP's role and approach are clearly spelt out, and which serve as the basis for UNDP country level support within the relevant country programming frameworks. There is evidence of consistent guidance and support to country offices over the entire period UNDP has been involved in mine action. UNDP headquarters support and oversight teams have systematically engaged with country-level mine action advisers through exchanges on their day-to-day work, direct support to programme design and implementation, an online practice exchange platform, and annual technical meetings held in Geneva and, every other year, in a mine-affected country (e.g., Colombia, Jordan, Mozambique) and timed to coincide whenever possible with meetings of States Parties to the APMBC. These meetings were complemented by training workshops that provided further guidance to mine action advisers on UNDP mine action approaches, including strategic framing, programme design and mine action-specific monitoring and evaluation. Senior UNDP management participated regularly in these meetings, and the 2007 annual UNDP Mine Action meeting was keynoted by the Associate Administrator, who shared with the advisers UNDP's strategic outlook regarding mine action.

21. UNDP management agrees with the observation that UNDP played a limited role in support of operational demining activities, the issuance of national mine action standards and the destruction of landmine and UXO stockpiles. This is in line with the fact that these are not core components of UNDP's mandated areas of mine action work. Consequently, UNDP does not have capacity in these areas and its future involvement will continue to be very limited.

22. UNDP welcomes and agrees with the evaluation's Conclusion 1 that UNDP support to mine action has contributed substantially to increased human safety, through the reduction of risk, and that to a lesser degree, it has also led to improvements in socioeconomic conditions at the community level. UNDP has facilitated the reconstruction and expansion of national infrastructure and helped nations to provide greater economic opportunities for their citizens in mine-affected communities. At the same time, the greatest impact of UNDP support to mine action at the community level is the reduction of fear.

23. UNDP management takes note of Conclusion 2, that the scaling down of the mine action global programme at UNDP over the past decade has lessened its strategic coherence and limited the capacity of UNDP headquarters to fully support its staff at the country level. In response, UNDP has reinstated the requisite headquarters and regional programme and policy capacities on development and mine action. As indicated earlier, a limited number of dedicated staff now work specifically on development and mine action issues at both headquarters and at regional level (Amman, Istanbul and Bangkok), supporting and complementing the demand-driven work of field-level mine action specialists in line with related UNDP Strategic Plan outcomes.

24. UNDP acknowledges the observation that the plan to progressively phase out UNDP involvement in mine action caused uncertainty among stakeholders as to the long-term strategic engagement of UNDP in this area and that this pause constituted a break from the expectations set out in the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action. Nevertheless, UNDP continued during this interval to be engaged in development and mine action through its numerous ongoing projects in programme countries.

25. UNDP management notes with concern the observation under Conclusion 3 that the transition to national ownership of mine action in some countries aided by UNDP has been slow and inconsistent, and the sustainability of some nationally-managed programmes remains in question. While we acknowledge the fact that more work is needed by UNDP as well as by the Governments concerned and their mine action partners to attain full national ownership and leadership, UNDP has invested significantly, as the evaluation acknowledges, in building the sustainability of national mine action institutions. It has demonstrated significant results in this areas in a number of countries including Albania, Angola, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, and Tajikistan. Efforts in this area will continue as part of the UNDP demand-driven support to development and mine action, and through implementation of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018.

26. UNDP management takes note of Conclusion 4 that as mine action programmes mature, they tend to become increasingly more focused on poor rural communities with a wide array of development challenges, and that UNDP has recognized that there are important development linkages for mine action, although there is scant evidence that this recognition has led to the linking or targeting of other development programming in poor communities that have been demined. To address this, UNDP will strengthen its focus on development and livelihoods recovery within its mine action support, with linkages to other programmes. One of the priority areas identified in the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action is translating mine action into sustainable development dividends such as food security, jobs and livelihoods.

27. Management takes note of the recommendation that UNDP should reaffirm its strategic commitment to mine action support globally, and to ensure that those countries with ongoing mine action programmes are fully supported at the headquarters and regional levels. In addition, UNDP has confirmed to programme countries and to its partners its re-engagement with countries on mine action - upon request - and where its support contributes to the objectives of the Strategic Plan. This will also be communicated to non-governmental organization and civil society organization partners during future meetings of State Parties to the APMBC and at the upcoming International Meeting of Mine Action National Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers (Geneva, 16 February 2016).

Annex. Key evaluation recommendations and UNDP management response

Recommendation 1. UNDP should reaffirm its strategic commitment to mine action support globally and ensure that the dozen countries with ongoing mine action programmes are fully supported at the headquarters and regional levels.

Management response

UNDP management agrees that UNDP should support mine action over the long term, both to comply with obligations created by the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention and as part of its long-standing post-conflict recovery support to national Governments. UNDP management will also: (a) ensure that mine action technical advisers have requisite management and capacity-building skills; (b) ensure that UNDP is providing practical guidance to countries on transitioning to national implementation and enhancing development support in demined areas; and (c) maintain high-level headquarter engagement with the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-ME), the Mine Action Support Group and the annual meeting of Mine Action National Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
1.1 Recruitment of key staff at headquarters and regional levels.	By the end of December 2015	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS)		
1.2 Training of national staff and chief technical advisers for mine action on development and mine action using the guidance provided in the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action.	In the course of 2016-2017	BPPS		
1.3 Participation in the: (a) IACG-ME; (b) Mine Action Support Group; and (c) the annual meeting of national directors and United Nations advisers.	Ongoing: (a) monthly (b) biannually (c) annually	BPPS		
1.4 Through discussions in the IACG-ME, ensure that there is greater clarity in the Strategy on the roles and responsibilities for technical support to victim assistance.	By June 2016	BPPS		

Recommendation 2. UNDP should further enhance its institutional capacity support services to Governments on mine action, building on lessons from successful transitions to sustainable national ownership and utilizing South-South cooperation opportunities and closer engagement with United Nations and other international partners.

Management response

UNDP management agrees with the recommendation that UNDP should continue and enhance support to national Governments in the following areas: (a) institutional capacity assessment for mine action, including the use of relevant indicators; (b) development and management of comprehensive databases of suspect and released mine areas; (c) land release prioritization; (d) strategies for transition to national ownership of mine action programmes; (e) mainstreaming mine action into broader development imperatives, with special emphasis on marginalized communities; (f) taking gender aspects into account in mine action programming; (g) linking victim assistance support, where it exists within mine action programmes, into broader support for persons with a disability; (h) efficiently channeling donor funding; and (i) utilizing partnerships with other United Nations agencies and international organizations.

UNDP will update its mine action programme guidance to clarify priorities, elaborate practical methods and utilize its roster of qualified consultants for technical support and policy research in the above areas.

UNDP management also agrees that a stronger focus on Strategic Objective 3 is needed and will actively participate in the midterm evaluation of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action, and advocated for greater emphasis within this Strategic Objective on the capacity development of national institutions with clearer indicators for measuring success. It is, however, important to note that UNDP's contribution is also key for Objective 1, Reducing risks to individuals and socioeconomic impacts of mines and ERW, which is an important areas of focus for UNDP's development and mine action work. In early 2015, the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action was prepared and identified the following two areas of focus: (a) translating mine action into sustainable development dividends in the form of jobs and livelihoods; (b) strengthening national institutions that accelerate development benefits, including livelihoods and human security. In view of this and in the context of the UNDP Strategic Plan, a sharper focus on the development and mine action agenda will be pursued. This approach will follow three tracks: (a) context/assessment: ensuring that the impact of landmines/ERW on development is well understood and includes policy and institutional capacities required to enhance jobs and livelihoods through mine action programming; (b) capacities/areas of focus: the selection of the areas of focus will be informed by the assessment/analysis; (c) development outcomes: development outcomes will be measured either directly or indirectly through jobs/livelihoods generated, particularly for women and marginalized groups; hectares of land cultivated, human security, etc. Under the first area of focus, UNDP mine action programmes will concentrate on three themes: protecting lives; restoring livelihoods; and supporting recovery and development. Under the second area of focus, UNDP will concentrate on strengthening national institutions that accelerate development benefits, e.g., human security or other opportunities. Links to the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 will be ensured through alignment of mine action with the plan's Outcome 1 (Growth and development are inclusive and sustainable, incorporating productive capacities that create employment and livelihoods for the poor and excluded) and Outcome 3 (Countries have strengthened institutions to progressively deliver universal access to basic services).				
2.1 Review and finalize UNDP Strategic Framework on Mine Action with inputs from key partners, regional bureaux, regional hubs and country offices.	By March 2016	BPPS in cooperation with respective regional hubs, regional bureaux and country offices		
2.2. Provide capacity-building and advisory support to country offices to ensure that they can align current mine action programmes to the development and mine action areas of focus, as articulated in the UNDP Support Framework for Development and Mine Action including areas highlighted under Recommendation 2 of this evaluation report, in particular (a) institutional capacity assessment for mine action, including the use of relevant indicators; (b) development and management of comprehensive databases of suspect and released mine areas; (c) land release prioritization; (d) strategies for the transition to national ownership of mine action programmes; (e) mainstreaming mine action into broader development imperatives, with special emphasis on marginalized communities; (f) taking gender aspects into account in mine action programming; (g) linking victim assistance support, where it exists within mine action programmes, into broader support for persons with a disability; and (h) efficiently channeling donor funding.	In the course of 2016-2017	BPPS and regional service centres		
2.3 Provide continuous policy, programme and technical support to national Governments in the areas highlighted under Recommendation 2	In the course of 2016-2017	UNDP country offices, supported by		

of this evaluation report (see areas under 2.2 above). This will include a focus on strategies for transition to full national ownership, taking into account both government capacities and practical needs when completing and closing down land mine programmes, in order to maintain a residual capacity for response and to support future development projects on land previously affected by mines.		BPPS		
2.4 Support national and local governments, including national mine action authorities, to develop comprehensive databases of all sites that were ever suspect or demined in order to properly plan for future land use and development projects; ensure that data are captured and shared with appropriate government entities.	Ongoing By March 2017	BPPS, regional hubs		
2.5. Promote South-South cooperation and cross-fertilization of best practices across different regions.	In the course of 2016-2017	BPPS, regional service centres, country offices and regional bureaux		
2.6 Design and implement monitoring and evaluation systems that take into account the capacities of the government and other national counterparts, including additional M&E training where needed.	By December 2016	UNDP country offices, supported by BPPS		
2.7 Participate fully in the upcoming midterm review of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013-2018, advocating greater emphasis on, and strengthening indicators for developing sustainable national management capacities as a core feature of Strategic Objective 3 (development of national capacity);	By December 2016	BPPS		
2.8. Document lessons learned, best practices and experiences on gender and mine action; develop knowledge products and circulate for replication of best practices.	By December 2017	BPPS, regional hubs and country offices		

Recommendation 3. In the near term, most of the requests for UNDP support on mine action will focus on mature national programmes in non-conflict circumstances, where the residual mine problems are located in poor rural areas. This suggests an important development need that UNDP is well suited to support by providing strategies and techniques for job creation and market development, and by channelling targeted donor support towards improving the socioeconomic conditions in mine-affected communities.

Management response

UNDP management fully agrees that the capacities of rural communities, especially poor ones, to improve standards of living is dependent on many factors such as access to labour, credit and markets. In nearly every community impacted by landmines, the lives and livelihoods of the communities and citizens are improved as a result of demining and land release. Management agrees that UNDP should do far more to support national and subnational authorities and affected communities in stimulating the local economy. The clearance of landmines should not be seen as an end result, but rather as an initial step in a much longer development effort.

Moving forward, one of the main objectives of UNDP initiatives should be the attainment of socioeconomic benefits. In essence, project developers and implementers will need to ensure that released land is used for socioeconomic development. In order to pursue this strategy and overcome all possible bottlenecks, the UNDP approach to mine action will follow three tracks, as identified above in the management response to Recommendation 2:

(a) context analysis and needs assessment. This will help to ensure that the impact of landmines/ERW on development is well known and understood, and that this information is factored into the selection of recovery and development priorities. The assessment will also cover the policy and institutional capacities required to enhance jobs and livelihoods through mine action programming;

(b) careful selection of the areas of focus. The selection and packaging of the areas of focus will be informed by the assessment/analysis and guided by their relevance to and synergy with related focus areas of the UNDP Strategic Plan;

(c) emphasis on results and outcomes. Results achieved will be measurable contributions to development outcomes, and will contribute either directly or indirectly to jobs created, livelihoods restored and other social and environmental indicators (depending on the focus of any particular mine action intervention). In the context of partnering with national institutions, UNDP will work not only with national mine action authorities but also with relevant ministries for sector-led development. A key focus for UNDP will be to strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations that enable people's participation in development planning and acceleration of peace and development dividends, in particular livelihoods in areas previously affected by mines. UNDP will work with other development actors, in particular the private sector and national public service institutions, to ensure that planning is done for development. In addition, UNDP will maintain its role of initiator and nurture South-South and triangular collaboration, including with a wide range of development practitioners and focusing on the creation of development benefits for affected women, men, and communities.				
3.1. Provide capacity-building and advisory support to country office staff (international and national staff), technical advisers and project staff on how to support national efforts by following three tracks in development and mine action programming, and by focusing on socioeconomic impact.	In the course of 2016-2017	BPPS and regional hubs		
3.2. Provide capacity-building support to government authorities on prioritizing and planning development and mine action efforts, using cross-sectoral approaches and ensuring cooperation between the different ministries and other relevant institutions.	In the course of 2016-2017	BPPS and regional hubs		
3.3 Ensure realignment of current mine action programmes with the UNDP Strategic Plan, 2014-2017 and with the UNDP Support Framework on Development and Mine Action.	By the end of December 2017	BPPS, regional hubs and country offices		
3.4 Prepare and circulate the knowledge product on lessons learned related to mine action programming for use by countries, the community of practice on development and mine action and partners for replication and South-South cooperation.	By the end of December 2017	BPPS, regional hubs and country offices		

* The implementation status is tracked in the Evaluation Resource Centre.